



People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
Mohammed Kheidar University – Biskra  
Faculty of letters and languages  
Department of English

# The Celluloid Depiction of African American Character in Pre and Post Civil Right Movement

A dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and the English Language for the degree of Master in Language and Civilization

Submitted By:  
Nedjlaoui Akram

Supervised By:  
Dr.ElHamel Lamdjed

## Board of Examiners

- |                      |                      |            |
|----------------------|----------------------|------------|
| • Dr.ElHamel Lamdjed | University of Biskra | Supervisor |
| • Mr.Chemouri Mourad | University of Biskra | Examiner   |
| • Dr.Halima Hamed    | University of Biskra | Chairman   |

Academic Year 2023/2024

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my Parents, Brothers and sisters.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to extend my profound and heartfelt appreciation to my research supervisor, Dr. Elhamel Lamdjed. His unwavering guidance and support throughout the entire process of completing this study, along with the references he generously provided, were hopeful. His insightful advice played a pivotal role in successfully accomplishing this survey.

Dr. Lamdjed's dedicated investment of expertise and time significantly contributed to the successful fulfillment of this dissertation, not to mention his wise knowledge, which I deeply value.

I also want to convey my gratitude to the committee members for their valuable advice and guidance.

A special thank you goes out to DR. Walid Kefali, University of Khenchela , For his support and help.

A sincere thank you goes out to all my teachers at the Department of English at Biskra University for their support and instruction.

### **Abstract**

This study aims to uncover the realities of depicting African Americans within classical Hollywood cinema, while also examining any noticeable shifts in modern American cinema. It provides a historical analysis of Hollywood, particularly focusing on the portrayal of African American actors and actresses. The investigation delves into how these individuals were depicted in classical films compared to their portrayal in contemporary cinema. Despite Hollywood's claims of promoting cultural diversity and supporting talent regardless of racial backgrounds, this study seeks to determine whether such inclusivity has been consistently practiced. It seeks to explore the trajectory of representation, examining the origins of various stereotypes and their lasting impact on American society, especially within the African American community.

Utilizing content analysis and film analysis methodologies, the study examines a selection of American films featuring African American actors and actresses from two distinct cinematic periods. This deliberate selection allows for an exploration of their representation across different time frames. The comparative analysis aims to indicate any changes and continuities in the portrayal of African Americans. In conclusion, the study suggests that while contemporary representations may seem to showcase improved portrayals of African Americans on the surface, enduring obstacles and stereotypes persist, potentially impeding progress toward social equality and the elimination of discrimination. Despite years of activism, the study underscores the ongoing challenges faced by the African American community.

**Keywords:** African Americans, stereotypes, Hollywood, representation. Portrayals.

## ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى كشف الحقائق المتعلقة بالأفارقة الأمريكيين في السينما الهوليوودية الكلاسيكية، وكذلك فحص التغيرات الملحوظة في السينما الأمريكية الحديثة، حيث تقدم الدراسة نظرة تاريخية حول هوليوود، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على تمثيل الممثلين والممثلات الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي. وتتناول الدراسة كيفية تصوير هؤلاء الأفراد في الأفلام الكلاسيكية مقارنةً بتمثيلهم في السينما المعاصرة .

على الرغم من تأكيد هوليوود على تعزيز التنوع الثقافي ودعم المواهب بغض النظر عن الخلفيات العرقية، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق مما إذا كانت هذه الشمولية قد تم ممارستها بانتظام. وتهدف أيضا إلى استكشاف المسار التطوري للتمثيل، وفحص جذور الصور النمطية المختلفة وتأثيرها على المجتمع الأمريكي، خاصة فيما يتعلق بالجالية الإفريقية الأمريكية. من خلال استخدام منهجيات تحليل المحتوى والأفلام، تقوم الدراسة بفحص مجموعة من الأفلام الأمريكية التي تضم ممثلين وممثلات من أصل أفريقي في فترتين سينمائييتين مختلفتين. ويتيح هذا الاختيار الدقيق استكشاف تمثيلهم عبر فترات زمنية مختلفة و يهدف التحليل المقارن إلى توضيح التغيرات والاستمراريات في تمثيل الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي.

في الختام، تشير الدراسة إلى أن التمثيل المعاصر قد أظهر تحسنا في تمثيل الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي ، إلا أن الصور النمطية القديمة والعقبات المستمرة تعيق التقدم نحو المساواة الاجتماعية والقضاء على التمييز بشكل كامل. فرغم سنوات نشاط السود النضالي، فإن الدراسة تسلط الضوء على التحديات المستمرة التي تواجه الجالية الإفريقية الأمريكية في سينما هوليوود **الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأمريكيون الأفارقة، الصور النمطية، هوليوود، التقديم، التصوير.

### **List of Abbreviations**

AMPAS Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

AAFCA African-American Film Critics Association

ASU Arizona State University

BART Police Station - Bay Area Rapid Transit

DUP Duke University Press

IMDB Internet Movie Database

KKK Ku Klux Klan

OSU Ohio State University

OSW OscareSoWhite

UCLA University OF California Los Angeles

WD Walet Disney

## List Of Tables

Best Actors in Leading Roles .....	12
------------------------------------	----

## List Of Figures

Figure 1: the Help Official Poster.....	27
Figure 2: The maid Aibileen Clarck and the baby Mae Mobley.....	28
Figure 3: The maid Constantine and Miss Skeeter, another spiritual mother..	29
Figure 4: The maid Minny Jackson using Mrs Hilly's home bathroom.....	30
Figure 5: The arrest of the maid Yule Mae for stealing Hilly's ring.....	31
Figure 6 : the hate u give official poster.....	32
Figure 7 : shoot first, ask questions later.....	33
Figure 8 : Starr and Hailey's fight.....	34
Figure 9 : Chris the white saviour.....	35
Figure 10 : Fruitvale Station Official Poster.....	36
Figure 11 : The Birth of a Nation Official Poster.....	37
Figure 12 : The Black Buck.....	38
Figure 13 : Black People in Master's Hall.....	39

## Table of content

Dedication.....	.II
Acknowledgment.....	.III
Abstract.....	.IV
List of abbreviations.....	.V
List of tables/figures.....	.VI
Table content.....	.VII
Introduction .....	1
Chapter one : African Americans in American Cinema.	
Introduction.....	3
1.1 The Era of Blackface Performances.....	4
1.2 Jim Crow Laws.....	6
1.3 The Era of the African American Servant.....	7
1.4 Modern “non-racist” Hollywood.....	8
1.5 The LA Rebellion Movement.....	9
1.6 The White Savior Complex.....	10
1.7 Oscarsowhite.....	11
Conclusion.....	14
Chapter Two: The Evolution of African American Portrayals in Hollywood	
Cinema	
Introduction.....	15
2.1 - African Americans Revolution in Hollywood.....	16
2.2 -Hollywood Exhibits not Just Racism But Also Sexism.....	17



2.2.1 -The Emasculation of The Black Male Image.....	18
2.2.2 - The Ridicule Directed at African American Women.....	19
2.3 -The Portrayal of Blackness in Modern Hollywood Cinema.....	20
2.4 - Politics of Representation in Modern Black Cinema.....	21
2.5 African American Role Models in the American Cinema.....	23
Conclusion.....	24
Chapter three : Black Americans Representation in Hollywood Cinema between past and present	
Introduction.....	25
The Movies.....	27
3.1. The Help 2011.....	27
3.2. The Hate U give.....	31
3.3. Fruitvale station 2011.....	35
3.4. The Birth of a Nation.....	37
Conclusion.....	40
Conclusion of the survey.....	41
Work cited.....	42

## **Introduction**

Hollywood stands as one of the most globally successful movie industries, with nearly 700 films annually according to statistics. This prolific output, coupled with the contributions of countless talented actors, producers, filmmakers, and scriptwriters, has solidified American cinema as a focal point for movie enthusiasts worldwide. While Hollywood's cultural influence is undeniable, it has played a great role in shaping negative perceptions and stereotypes, particularly affecting people of different religion, color, and more specifically, Black individuals. Despite Hollywood's current celebration of diversity and the inclusion of actors from various cultural backgrounds, this was not always the case. In the classical movie era, individuals with lighter skin dominated the big screen, relegating those with darker skin to stereotypical and often humiliating roles. Early portrayals focused on physical features, reinforcing negative stereotypes through depictions of dark skin, big lips, huge ears, and exaggerated mannerisms.

Historically, America has grappled with racism, and African Americans bore a significant burden in both real life and the fictional worlds depicted on screens. They were often relegated to subservient roles, loyal servants or followers to white characters, or entirely omitted, replaced by white actors donning blackface to perpetuate dehumanizing stereotypes for entertainment. Economic disparities further marginalized Black individuals, limiting their access to cinemas, reinforcing societal divisions.

On-screen representations can significantly influence societal attitudes, and the consistent portrayal of Black people as inferior or as animals show contributed to widespread discrimination and prejudice. Some actors even found solace in degrading roles, viewing acting as a servant as preferable to the harsh reality of their circumstances. The desire for more

substantial roles and societal change gained momentum with the LA rebellion, a testament to the resilience of a generation unwilling to accept their marginalization.

While the civil rights movement (1954-1968) granted African Americans freedom, it did not guarantee social or artistic equality. The fight for equality continued both on and off the screen, encompassing various mediums and stages. Over time, there has been a noticeable shift in Hollywood's portrayal of African Americans, presenting them in more positive and diverse roles. This evolution reflects a broader societal push for equality, challenging and changing ingrained stereotypes.

The study delves into the perspective of African Americans within the American cinema, exploring Hollywood's stages of portraying them and assessing whether these changes are for the better or worse. Through the analysis and comparison of scenes from different time periods, the study uncovers stereotypes embedded in American society, drawing a direct line to their origins in film and examining their lasting impact on the African American experience.

Moreover, the study unveils hidden messages within scenes, requiring a nuanced understanding of African American history to fully comprehend. Each chapter guides readers through a deeper exploration, encouraging them to form their conclusions about the complex interplay between Hollywood, African Americans, and societal perceptions.

The central problem this study addresses is the persistent and evolving stereotypes and misrepresentations of African Americans in Hollywood cinema, despite Hollywood's claims of promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity. African American actors and actresses have historically been depicted in stereotypical and often demeaning roles. The study seeks to uncover the realities behind these portrayals and examine whether significant progress has been made in the representation of African Americans in contemporary cinema.

This study seeks to ask a question as follows "How have the depictions of African American characters in Hollywood cinema evolved from the pre-Civil Rights era to the present day, and to what extent have these portrayals impacted societal perceptions and contributed to the ongoing challenges faced by the African American community?"

And to examine the selected movies, we used content analysis methodology. Content analysis is a research technique used to identify the occurrence of specific words, themes, or ideas within qualitative data. Using content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of such words, themes, or ideas. For example, researchers can evaluate the language used in a news article to search for bias or impartiality. Researchers can then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the author(s), the audience, and even the culture and time surrounding the text. Our primary objective is to uncover the truth behind the Hollywood's depiction of African Americans, racial discrimination and highlight the changes made in modern American cinema.

To help mark out our categories we watched four movies from different cinematic eras to increase the reliability of the coding, and then we coded different implements. Finally, after analysing the content of the movie we choose a number of scenes to confirm the movies relevance to the implements studied.

In conclusion, our research seeks to explore Hollywood's portrayal of African Americans throughout its history, analyzing and comparing scenes from different time periods to uncover changes and their impact. The study aims to shed light on the hidden messages within movies, examining the intricate relationship between on-screen representation and societal perceptions.

## **Chapter One: African Americans in the American Cinema.**

### **Introduction**

The American film industry, commonly known as Hollywood due to its place of origin, stands as one of the most significant artistic revolutions of the 20th century, dating back around 117 years ago. Hollywood has evolved through two distinct phases: the classical movies era, divided into the silent era (1890s to 1920s) and the sound era (1920s to 1960s), followed by the ongoing modern filmmaking stage.

Over the mentioned phases, black actors and actresses underwent a substantial transformation in their roles. Initially relegated to stereotypical portrayals such as slaves, maids, nannies, servants, and criminals, they gradually ascended to major roles, including doctors, lawyers, police officers, and even superheroes. This shift was neither smooth nor immediate.

Our research aims to delve into the WHYs, WHENs, WHEREs, and WHOs related to Hollywood's portrayal of black individuals. We seek to uncover realities and hidden messages behind the movies that have shaped our perceptions, questioning the stereotypes embedded in our minds since childhood.

Before delving into our research, it is essential to note the shared characteristics among black characters in movies: specific ways of dressing, speaking, laughing, and lifestyle choices. These portrayals, often louder, angrier, and more violent, raise questions about whether they reflect the reality of black people in America or are strategically represented for a purpose. We ponder whether these representations influence reality or vice versa.

George Gerbner's assertion that "Representation in the world signifies social existence, absence means symbolic annihilation" (Gerbner 99-173).underlines the societal impact of on-screen

portrayals. This concept suggests that individuals are socially affected by what they see, leading to the formation of racial attitudes and beliefs. The absence or misrepresentation of certain groups can perpetuate societal divisions and stereotypes.

In an interview with Aviva Dove Viebahn, an assistant professor in the film and media studies program, the importance of representation in film and TV is emphasized. Dr. Viebahn highlights that showcasing experiences of people of color, women, and other marginalized groups normalizes their stories, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing the feeling of being "other-sized." Representation allows individuals to see themselves on screen, promoting emotional and mental well-being. (Ms.magazine)

Dylan Marron's "every single word" video series, which dissects the dialogue spoken by black characters in famous movies, further emphasizes the issue of representation. Marron's findings reveal instances where black people are nearly invisible in certain films, emphasizing the impact of misrepresentation in the industry.

### **1.1. The Era of Blackface Performances.**

Before Hollywood began to include black actors, it relied on the use of blackface. Blackface originally denoted the practice of applying makeup to emulate the appearance of a black person, particularly associated with minstrel shows in the United States from the 1830s to the mid-20th century. Currently, it is widely recognized as highly offensive—essentially, it involves painting a white actor's face black to portray a black character. For over a century, white performers have engaged in blackface, initially to mock enslaved Africans in U.S. minstrel shows. This practice was racist and offensive then, and it persists as such today.

Harmeet Kaur said” blackface extends beyond altering skin color or wearing a costume. It invokes a racist and painful history, not just because of the paint on the actor's face but also due

to the accompanying behaviors, such as exaggerating features to conform to stereotypical "black" traits and wearing tattered clothing". While intended to amuse a white audience, these performances were demeaning and hurtful to the black community, reinforcing negative stereotypes. (CNN)

David Leonard, a professor of comparative ethnic studies and American at Washington DC. State, asserts that blackface is an assertion of power and control. It allows a society to routinely and historically imagine African Americans as not fully human, serving to rationalize violence and Jim Crow segregation. (Clark)

Dr. David's statement proved true, depicting black Americans as less than human, akin to comedic characters entertaining privileged white people, diminishing sympathy toward black people and making mistreatment acceptable. The current consensus on blackface minstrelsy is well summarized by Frederick Douglass's righteous response in *The North Star*. Blackface imitators, he stated, were "the filthy scum of White society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens." (Rochester)

The culture that embraced it was either wholly enchanted by racial travesty or so benighted. There is no denying that the blackface era was one of the darkest periods in American cinematic history. Even though it occurs less frequently in modern American movies, it has left an impact on American streets. To this day, blackface is considered a "funny" entertaining move for Halloween and other occasions, despite the awareness of its dark history, its racist nature, and its humiliation of black people. Alarming, even celebrities, considered role models, continue to engage in this act without facing consequences because, ultimately, there is no law to ban or incriminate such behavior.

## 1.2. Jim Crow Laws

The Jim Crow Laws comprised a set of state and local regulations that sanctioned racial segregation. Originating from a Black minstrel show character, these laws endured for approximately a century, spanning from the post-Civil War era until 1968. Their primary objective was to marginalize African Americans by depriving them of voting rights, job opportunities, education, and other prospects. Those who resisted these laws often confronted repercussions such as arrest, fines, imprisonment, violence, and even death. This historical period significantly impacted Black American cinema, leading to a regression in progress after strides made during the civil rights movement.

Segregation not only separated the physical spaces of movie theaters based on race but also influenced the types of films showcased. Movie houses designated for Black audiences, often located in segregated neighborhoods, were prevalent venues for Black individuals to view films. However, due to their racial focus, these theaters encountered challenges in obtaining first-run movies from distributors. This delay, as described by Ellen C. Scott, resulted in a knowledge gap between Black and white communities, leading to the prominence of distinct film offerings in Black movie houses nationwide. Despite facing a "second run" status, some theater owners contested this inequality, arguing that they weren't in direct competition with whites-only theaters. An alternative approach involved presenting an empowering and dignified portrayal of Black people derived from their own community. (Jackson)

Miss Jackson says that the impact of Jim Crow laws extended beyond actors to the audience, influencing both Black and white cinema. The controversial film "The Birth of a Nation" exacerbated racial tensions in American cinema after its release in 1915. Criticized for its overtly racist content, the film depicted lynching as a positive act, perpetuating harmful



stereotypes through blackface and portraying white characters as violent savages and rapists. Despite its box-office success and advanced cinematic techniques, the film's blatant racism generated criticism. Some historians justified its success by highlighting the technical brilliance, asserting that the film's techniques overshadowed its racial aggression. This perspective essentially suggested that, while acknowledging the racism, the audience's (predominantly white) appreciation for the film eclipsed concerns about its prejudiced content.

### **1.3. The Era of the African American Servant**

After years of excluding black actors, the industry began casting black individuals for roles traditionally portrayed in blackface by white actors. However, these opportunities were limited to small and stereotypical parts. One such portrayal was Uncle Tom, an offensive term derived from the character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin," referring to a black man perceived as overly compliant with white interests. (Stowe).

Adena Spingarn, an author and scholar of American cultural history, explored the evolution of the Uncle Tom character in her book *Uncle Tom from Martyr to Traitor*. She discussed the transformation of Uncle Tom from a heroic figure to a perceived traitor who compromised his own race for white approval. Despite being beloved by white audiences in old American cinema, Uncle Tom was met with disrespect from the black community. (Spingarn)

The female counterpart to Uncle Tom was the offensive stereotype known as the mammy, historically used in the Southern states to describe a black woman responsible for caring for a white family's children. In "The Birth of a Nation," the mammy archetype is deeply ingrained in antebellum mythology, maintaining a powerful and enduring influence on the American psyche. This stereotype perpetuates racial and gender essentialism, Southern nostalgia, and a problematic narrative of inferiority.

Beyond Uncle Tom and the mammy, other stereotypes persisted, including the Coon character, portrayed as goofy and foolish, and the tragic mulatto, a mixed-race individual struggling to find acceptance in both worlds. The black buck, characterized by rebellious behavior and a perceived threat to the white community, also contributed to the perpetuation of racism in both artistic expression and reality. These stereotypes continue to manifest in modern filmmaking, reflecting the lasting impact of prejudiced portrayals on society.

#### **1.4. Present “non- racists” Hollywood**

In the contemporary Hollywood landscape, black actors have gained visibility on the big screen, and the roles they portray are more diverse. Recent studies indicate that black actors represent 12.9% of leading roles in cable scripted shows, aligning proportionally with the overall black population of 13.4%. However, behind the scenes, the numbers are less promising, with only 6% of writers, directors, and producers of U.S.-produced films being black. While these figures, though modest, suggest improvement, the equality in the modern and anti-racist world is not yet fully realized. (Lindner)

In an interview with ASU NEWS, Aviva Dove Viebhan, an assistant professor in the film and media studies program in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, was questioned about the state of black representation in the film and TV industry. Aviva expressed optimism, stating, "I think things are getting better, especially in the last couple of years. There's a conscious effort among networks, production companies, and studios to not only embrace more diversity but also seek meaningful diversity, however, she also noted the need to observe whether this change is sustained or merely a response to Hollywood's recent acknowledgment of its shortcomings. (Bordow).

Reflecting on the transformation in the portrayal of black individuals on screen, Aviva emphasized that the substantial shift didn't occur overnight due to a sudden change of heart among white individuals. Instead, it resulted from various artistic movements, such as the LA Rebellion, that worked towards improving circumstances and fostering a less hostile environment for young black actors to thrive in the Hollywood spotlight.

### **1.5. The LA Rebellion Movement**

During the period from 1967 to 1989, a significant number of filmmakers who had graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), actively participated in a movement focused on creating films specifically for black audiences. These African and African American filmmakers aimed to authentically represent black culture, pushing back against the stereotypical portrayals commonly found in traditional movies.

This movement, known as the LA Rebellion, coincided with the emergence of Third Cinema, a film and film theory prevalent in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Third Cinema sought to bring about societal transformation by educating and radicalizing audiences through subversive cinema. Within the LA Rebellion, black filmmakers aimed to challenge prevailing narratives and provide a more genuine depiction of black experiences.

Frustrated with the limited representation in mainstream white-centric films, Black Americans took matters into their own hands. Opting for all-black movies, they aimed to tell their own stories from their own perspectives.

In subsequent years, certain film companies began producing films with an "all-color cast," creating what became known as the race movie genre. These films focused exclusively on the positive aspects of black people, as reported by Duke University Press (DUP). However,

despite their noble intentions, these companies faced challenges due to a lack of commercial appeal, struggling to attract a white audience and leaving black actors in a precarious position.

### **1.6. The White Savior complex**

The phenomenon often referred to as "Oscar bait," where movies featuring black actors or depicting the stories of black characters are believed to require a white character to play a savior role. This concept is commonly known as the "white savior," a critical term describing a white person portrayed as liberating, rescuing, or uplifting non-white individuals. The term has been particularly associated with narratives set in Africa, with certain characters in film and television criticized as embodying white savior figures. "White Savior Industrial Complex", if we want to interfere in the lives of others, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement. (Cole)

Numerous notable films in modern cinema have employed the white savior trope, often successfully appealing to white audiences. Here are a few instances where the white savior complex was employed

- **The Help (2011)** - This film, based on Kathryn Stockett's novel, portrays a young white woman who writes a book about the experiences of African American maids in 1960s Mississippi. Critics argue that it centralizes the story around the white protagonist rather than the Black characters and perpetuates the idea of a white savior.
- **The Green Mile (1999)** - While not explicitly about race, this film based on Stephen King's novel features a white prison guard (played by Tom Hanks) who forms a special bond with a black death row inmate. Some critics argue that it presents the white character as a benevolent figure who saves the Black prisoner.
- **Dangerous Minds (1995)** - This film stars Michelle Pfeiffer as a white teacher who inspires her racially diverse class of underprivileged students, many of whom are African

American. Critics have noted the white savior narrative in which the teacher is portrayed as the catalyst for positive change in the lives of her students.

- *The Blind Side* (2009) - As previously mentioned, this film tells the true story of a wealthy white family who takes in a homeless African American teenager and helps him achieve success in football and academics. It has been criticized for perpetuating the white savior trope.

Furthermore, the list extends with movies employing this trope to capture the white audience's attention, alongside several other tropes that perpetuate stereotypes of African Americans in contemporary filmmaking, such as the black best friend trope, the nerdy black person trope, and the strong black women trope.

### **1.7. Oscar so White**

In 2015, the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite gained traction when activist April Reign tweeted it in response to 20 Oscar nominations being exclusively given to white actors. This highlighted the longstanding issue of diversity within the Academy Awards ceremonies. Since its establishment in 1927, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has awarded only 20 black actors with Oscars. Hattie McDaniel, the first African American to win an Oscar for her role as "Mammy" in "Gone with the Wind," faced discrimination as an outsider during the ceremony and was not welcomed at the "whites-only" after-party.

In 2016, the Academy pledged to implement changes to increase representation for African American actors and filmmakers. By 2018, two black actors secured Oscars – Mahershala Ali for "Green Book" as Best Supporting Actor and Regina King for "If Beale Street Could Talk" as Best Supporting Actress. In 2021, two more actors joined the ranks: Will Smith

for "King Richard" as Best Actor and Ariana DeBose for "West Side Story" as Best Supporting Actress.

Table 1

Best Actor in Leading Roles					
Year	Name	Film	Role	Status	Notes
1958	Sidney Poitier	The Defiant Ones	Noah Cullen	Nominated	First Black actor to be nominated for Best Actor.
1963		Lilies of the Field	Homer Smith	Won	Initial Black recipient of a competitive Oscar. Pioneer from the Bahamas to win Best Actor. First Black actor with dual acting nominations (Best Actor). Youngest Black actor to achieve Best Actor victory (at age 37).
1970	James Earl Jones	The Great White Hope	Jack Jefferson	Nominated	
1972	Paul Winfield	Souder	Nathan Lee Morgan	Nominated	The pioneering movie to showcase African-American nominees in both the categories of Best Actor and Best Actress.
1986	Dexter Gordon	Round Midnight	Dale Turner	Nominated	First jazz musician to be nominated for Best Actor.
1989	Morgan Freeman	Driving Miss Daisy	Hoke Colburn	Nominated	
1992	Denzel Washington	Malcolm X	Malcolm X	Nominated	
1993	Laurence Fishburne	What's Love Got to Do with It	Ike Turner	Nominated	The second movie to include African-American nominees for both the Best Actor and Best Actress categories
1994	Morgan Freeman	The Shawsha	Ellis Boyd 'Red'	Nominated	

		nk Redemption	Redding		
1999		The Hurricane	Rubin Carter	Nominated	
2001	Denzel Washington	Training Day	Alonzo Harris	Won	Second African-American actor to receive the award for Best Actor. First time two African-American performers won Oscars in the same year (Halle Berry, Monster's Ball). First African-American actor to win multiple competitive Academy Awards. First and only African-American actor to win Academy Awards in both acting categories (lead and supporting).
	Will Smith	Ali	Muhammad Ali	Nominated	First time multiple African-American actors nominated for Best Actor in the same year.
2004	Jamie Foxx	Ray	Ray Charles	Won	First African-American to receive two acting nominations in the same year.
	Don Cheadle	Hotel Rwanda	Paul Rusesabagina	Nominated	
2005	Terrence Howard		DJay	Nominated	
2006	Forest Whitaker	The Last King of Scotland	Idi Amin	Won	
	Will Smith	The Pursuit of Happiness	Chris Gardner	Nominated	
2009	Morgan Freeman	Invictus	Nelson Mandela	Nominated	

2012	Denzel Washington	Flight	William "Whip" Whitaker	Nominated	
2013	Chiwetel Ejiofor		Solomon Northup	Nominated	First Black British actor to be nominated for Best Actor.
2016	Denzel Washington	Fences	Troy Maxson	Nominated	First Black actor to be nominated for both acting and producing (Best Picture) in the same year.
2017	Denzel Washington	Roman J. Israel, Esq.	Roman J. Israel	Nominated	Denzel Washington is the first African-American actor to be nominated two years in a row.
	Daniel Kaluuya	Get Out	Chris Washington	Nominated	Second Black British actor to be nominated for Best Actor.
2021	Will Smith	King Richard	Richard Williams	Won	Second Black actor, and ninth overall, to be nominated for both acting and producing (Best Picture) in the same year.
	Denzel Washington	The Tragedy of Macbeth	Lord Macbeth	Nominated	Denzel Washington has the most nominations for an African-American actor: Best Actor (7 nominations) and Best Supporting Actor (2 nominations). First African-American actor to receive a nomination for their performance in a Shakespeare adaptation.

Best Actor in Leading Roles . (WIKIPEDIA)

## Conclusion

While it may appear that racism in Hollywood has diminished with the increased presence of black actors and actresses on the big screen, along with the diverse roles they now undertake and their participation in various cinematic festivals, the reality for African American talent in the industry is far more complex. Despite the progress made, the deeper we delve into the glitz of Hollywood, the more evident it becomes that black actors and actresses still face significant



challenges. In a industry that claims to champion human rights and righteousness, the struggle persists for black individuals to assert their worthiness for the spotlight. They continue to battle stereotypes, proving not only their talent but also their suitability for leading roles and the capability to bring justice to such characters demonstrated by many actors who have excelled in significant roles in highly successful movies.

## **Chapter Two : The Evolution of African American Portrayals in Hollywood Cinema.**

### **Introduction**

The focus of the current study revolves around the portrayal of minorities in cinema and its consequential impact on our perceptions of these minority groups. It poses an intriguing inquiry into the role of films as reflective mirrors of our society, specifically expressing the perspectives of those in power, who historically have been predominantly white. Nevertheless, cinema also possesses the capability to present an idealized version of culture. Films, as potent cultural artifacts, wield significant influence over how we interact with others, shape our social and political awareness, determine our affections or admiration, and even influence our decisions to accept or reject certain individuals.

Examining the historical context, from minstrel shows prevalent in the early to mid-19th century, characterized by white actors with blackened faces performing stereotypical depictions of African Americans, to the subsequent era of vaudeville entertainment in the early 20th century, wherein black individuals were often subjected to demeaning portrayals. This historical trajectory reveals a persistent pattern of African Americans being ridiculed and relegated to inferior roles in American cinema. The term "schadenfreude" aptly captures the phenomenon, as the white audience derived pleasure from the misery, humiliation, and despair of black individuals. Black actors and actresses were confined to roles that demeaned their capabilities,

perpetuating a cycle of inequality on the big screen. Meaningful change is necessary to address these systemic issues within the industry.

### **2.1. African Americans Revolution in Hollywood**

Throughout history, Hollywood has consistently fallen short in accurately portraying and featuring minority groups. The evolution of depictions over time is particularly evident in the portrayal of Black individuals in American cinema, a subject we will delve into. We start with the early twentieth century when the first feature films emerged, including D.W. Griffith's controversial "Birth of a Nation" in 1915. This film, though considered a landmark in cinema history, depicted African Americans as intellectually inferior and sexually aggressive, portrayed by white actors in blackface. In contrast, Oscar Micheaux's "Within Our Gates" offered an alternative perspective, showcasing Black actors playing Black characters, yet it remains often overlooked.

Even in the early days, efforts were made to cast Black actors and tell their stories, with production companies like Norman Studios actively seeking to counter demeaning portrayals. Fast forward to 1967, and "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" portrayed interracial marriage positively, coinciding with the legal recognition of such unions in all 50 states. Despite legal strides such as the Brown v. Board of Education decision and the Civil Rights Act, attitudes toward Black people persisted, with the film receiving both acclaim and criticism for its cultural impact.

John Singleton "Boyz N the Hood" made a significant impact by providing a platform for black artists to authentically present a narrative from their own perspective. The film brought attention to the issues of police violence and gang culture that many young black individuals face.

Singleton's nomination for best Director at the Academy Awards acknowledged the film's influence on the portrayal of black characters in cinema.

In the 21st century, Hollywood has made gradual progress toward diversity and inclusion. While Black filmmakers have been telling their stories for a long time, broader industry recognition has been a slow process. Recent decades have seen films like "12 Years a Slave," "Selma," and "Moonlight" addressing America's troubled history in the treatment of Black people. The turning point arrived in 2018 with Ryan Coogler's "Black Panther," a Marvel film that became a critical and financial success. Not only was it the first superhero film nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards, but it also secured wins in categories like Best Costumes, Best Original Score, and Best Production Design.

The journey from blackface to "Black Panther" signifies a significant positive transformation in the representation of African Americans in movies. However, as the actress Queen Latifah aptly noted in "Hairspray Movie 2007" acknowledging the progress made, "I know we have come so far, but we still have a long way to go"

## **2.2. Hollywood Exhibits Not Just Racism But Also Sexism**

Recently, there has been an upraised focus on addressing racism and sexism in Hollywood films, evident in the choices of on-screen talent, behind-the-camera directors, and the portrayal of individuals on screen. This scanning extends to the evolution of Hollywood clichés over time. In the early days of Hollywood, black actors were often cast in roles that didn't align with their racial background. Instead, they were portrayed as caricatures by white performers donning blackface, a practice rooted in the American theatrical tradition of minstrelsy, featuring racist depictions of black people. While there has been substantial criticism, blackface is now less prevalent. Notably, works like "Dear White People" address and critique instances such as

college fraternity members hosting blackface-themed parties, sparking discussions about racism on college campuses.

Despite reduced use of blackface, new stereotypes have emerged as black characters and actors gain more prominence in Hollywood. Contemporary films still frequently portray black men as intimidating or hostile, and black women as stereo typically foul-mouthed and arrogant. The trope of the black best friend remains common, and if a character is to die in a movie, the black character is often the first to meet that fate. Even as societal awareness of racial stereotypes increases, Hollywood continues to perpetuate them. When Africa is depicted, it is often presented as dangerous and underdeveloped.

Most stereotyped images of black people in Hollywood center around black Americans, with fewer African-themed tropes, primarily due to the limited presence of African characters in Hollywood films. One prevalent cliché, referred to by TV tropes users as "Darkest Africa," depicts the continent as a mysterious and perilous isolated region with minimal connections to "modern" society. However, this representation is gradually becoming less common as attitudes and perspectives in the industry evolve.

### **2.2.1. The Emasculation of the Black Male Image**

The term "emasculatation" is sometimes used to describe the process by which the strength, authority, and masculinity of Black male characters are undermined or diminished in films and television. The image of the Black male has been systematically marginalized and emasculated, resulting in a diminished impact on society. While this process has, to some extent, involved the cooperation of individuals within the community, the overarching objective appears evident to undermine his ability to actively engage, lead, and protect his community.

### 2.2.2. The Ridicule Directed at African American Women

Since the Era of Jim Crow, various methods within American culture have been employed to belittle Black women, whether through the perpetuation of the 'Aunt Jemima' myth, the 'Jezebel' narrative, or the likening of Black women to monkeys. Unfortunately, these antiquated depictions persist, exerting a lasting impact on the perception of Black womanhood. In her article "Black Women Are Besieged on Social Media, and White Apathy Damns Us All," Janet Burns demonstrates how these technologies have enabled "legions of dedicated and 'everyday' racists" to subject Black women to "all the fresh hell and tired tropes they can muster." The defeminization of this group is observable in short-form videos that reimagining the humiliation of Black women. (Burns)

These videos recycle inexpensive jokes to cater to predominantly white audiences by embracing historical stereotypes of Black women. Tee Noir, in her YouTube video titled "The Market of Humiliating Black Women," remarks, "For these jokes to still be... recycled for [new] generations... demonstrates the true desire to disrespect and embarrass Black women in the name of comedy."

Subsequently, all these instances acknowledge that degrading Black women is a cost-effective strategy to generate controversy and attract a new audience. The issue lies in the fact that when a recurring 'joke' against Black women persists, society eventually internalizes these jokes as reality. As a result, Black females face prejudiced evaluations based on supposed attributes before having the chance to showcase their true characteristics, setting them up for failure. They are deprived of the opportunity to independently and peacefully cultivate their femininity or pursue hobbies, being instead forced into demeaning narratives. This persists into adulthood, where their attractiveness becomes a target for disrespect and ridicule.

### **2.3. The Portrayal of Blackness in Modern Hollywood Cinema.**

Similar to the early Black Movies, the Hollywood entertainment industry adopted and assimilated blaxploitation incorporating it into mainstream culture and diminishing its impact as a counter-narrative. As the 1970s gave way to the 1980s, the very same cultural system that challenged second wave feminism by promoting male-dominated action heroes and gender role reversals also produced films that resisted genuine cultural transformation in terms of racial justice, promoting an anti-reactionary, assimilation narrative. This narrative is evident in films like *Silver Streak* (1976), *Stir Crazy* (1980), *48 Hrs* (1982), and the *Lethal Weapon* franchise (1992), featuring two protagonists, one black and one white, overcoming differences. However, these films often overlooked the significant power and ability inequalities between the characters, sometimes making light of the situation.

This mirrors early film depictions of Blackness in some aspects. While those old caricatures were repugnant, they aimed to encourage integration (essentially another term for surrender). Characters like Uncle Tom, Mammy, and Stepin Fetchit were deemed acceptable representations for African Americans, while the sad mulatto and hazardous Black male served as warning signs. This narrative was part of a larger story of assimilation and acquiescence to white rule, and as we progress to the present, new stereotypes may emerge with similar objectives.

One such stereotype is the "Magical Negro," a recurring character with magical abilities solely existing to assist the white protagonist, seen in films like *The Green Mile* (1999), *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), *In America* (2002), *Bruce Almighty* (2003), and *The Unicorn Store* (2019). Another prevalent stereotype is the modernized "Thug" persona, a dangerous Black

man, found in numerous films and TV shows. Additionally, there's the stereotype of the "Local Mad Black Woman" characterized by inexplicable anger and little else.

The paragraph also touches on the "White Savior" trope, where white heroes rescue non-white individuals, seen in *The Blind Side* (2009), *The Help* (2011), *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), and others. Collectively, these stereotypes contribute to a common cultural paradigm emphasizing whiteness as normative and the implied value of non-white individuals surrendering or assimilating to that standard. Despite an increase in African American presence in mainstream film, the sheer number does not necessarily correspond to value when the portrayal perpetuates stereotypes.

This critique extends to the Academy Awards, with the #OscarsSoWhite movement since 2015 urging the Motion Picture Academy to address the lack of recognition for African American performers. Even when African Americans win significant awards, it is often for roles that validate white superiority, as exemplified by Denzel Washington and Halle Berry in 2002. Washington won Best Actor for his portrayal of an unjust "Thug" officer in *Training Day* (2001), and Berry won Best Actress for *Monster's Ball* (2001), depicting the widow of a death row convict involved with her late husband's white prison officer.

#### **2.4. Politics Of Representation in Modern Black Cinema.**

Modern black cinema plays a crucial role in challenging and reshaping the politics of representation. It strives to depict diverse and authentic narratives, addressing historical misrepresentations of black communities in mainstream media. Filmmakers often explore themes of identity, social justice, and culture nuances, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of black experiences. this evolution reflects a broader societal shift towards inclusivity and the recognition of diverse voices in the film industry.

Black producers in Hollywood face various obstacles, including systemic barriers that limit their access to funding, opportunities, and decision making roles. The industry has historically lacked diversity. Making it challenging for black producers to secure financing for projects and have their voices heard in the creative process. Additionally, there's a persistent struggle against stereotypes and lack of representation both on and off-screen. Despite these challenges, some producers have successfully navigated the industry, contributing to positive changes and creating platforms for more diverse storytelling.

There are several black filmmakers who have faced challenges in securing financing for their projects, despite their talent and creativity. One notable example is Spike Lee. Spike Lee is an acclaimed filmmaker known for his work in addressing racial issues in America. However, he has faced difficulties in obtaining funding for some of his projects.

One of the challenges Lee encountered was during the production of his iconic film "Do the Right Thing" (1989). The film dealt with racial tensions in a Brooklyn neighborhood during a hot summer day, and its controversial themes made it difficult for Lee to secure traditional financing. He had to rely on a combination of independent financing, contributions from prominent black figures like Bill Cosby and Oprah Winfrey, and funds from his own pocket to bring the project to fruition.

Spike Lee has spoken openly about the challenges modern black filmmakers face in the industry, including issues related to funding, distribution, and recognition. Despite these obstacles, he has remained a prolific and influential filmmaker, breaking barriers for other black directors in the industry. It's important to note that the struggle for financing in the film industry is not unique to Spike Lee, many talented black filmmakers continue to face similar challenges in securing funding for their projects like Ava Du Verna in her movie "Salma & Yasmine", and Barry



Jenkins in his movie ‘‘ Moonlight’’ and ‘‘ If Beale Street Could Talk ‘’. These difficulties are often tied to systemic issues within the entertainment industry that have historically marginalized filmmakers from underrepresented backgrounds.

## **2.5. African American Role Models in the American cinema**

Black role models in American cinema have played a crucial role in breaking down barriers, challenging stereotypes, and inspiring audiences with their talent, resilience, and achievements. These individuals have not only made significant contributions to the film industry but have also become influential figures in society. Here are some notable black role models in American cinema:

Oprah Winfrey (1954 –)

Winfrey is a producer, actress, television icon. She was the first Black American woman to own her own production company. Winfrey was once television’s highest-paid entertainer as the successful host of a syndicated television talk show that reached 15 million people a day , she became a rôle model for emerging young talents. Her roles in films like "The Color Purple" (1985) and her work as a producer have established her as a powerful and influential figure.

Steve Harvey (1957- )

Steve Harvey is one of the best influential African American. In 2000, Harvey established a long-running radio show, the material of which was adapted into the best-selling relationship book Act like a Lady, Think like a Man. He later had two daytime chat shows and is presently the presenter of the long-running game show Family Feud.

Morgan Freeman : (1936- )

An African American actor, producer, and narrator. Throughout a career spanning five decades and multiple film genres, he has received numerous accolades, including an Academy Award, a

Golden Globe Award, and a Screen Actors Guild Award as well as a nomination for a Tony Award .

Denzel Washington: (1954- )

One of the most respected actors in Hollywood, Denzel Washington has received numerous accolades, including two Academy Awards. His versatile performances in films like "Glory" (1989), "Training Day" (2001), and "Fences" (2016) have made him a role model for aspiring actors.

Will Smith :(1968- )

Is an American actor, rapper and film producer. He has received multiple accolades, including an Academy Award, a Golden Globe Award, a Screen Actors Guild Award, a BAFTA Award, and four Grammy Awards. As of 2024, his films have grossed over \$9.3 billion globally, making him one of Hollywood's most bankable stars .

### **Conclusion**

The journey of black Americans cinema has been remarkable, witnessing the emergence of talented black individuals in the art scene and the rise of new stars in Hollywood. While strides have been made, the battle for complete equality remains fierce. A shift in the representation of black characters is evident, moving from traditional roles as servants to positions of power such as CEOs. However, a critical examination reveals discrepancies. Recent statistics from the National Gang Center indicate that although black people constitute 35 percent of all gang members in America, Hollywood portrays them as 64 percent of onscreen gang members. This trend extends to various roles, with credits like "gangster," "gangbanger," and "thug" predominantly featuring black actors. In contrast, terms like "henchman" are predominantly white. This discrepancy challenges the notion of equality in Hollywood.

Despite increased diversity in film, the cost appears to be a stereotypical criminal portrayal of black individuals. This depiction not only distorts their on-screen reputation but also influences perceptions on the streets. Some black individuals, perhaps influenced by media portrayals, embrace this criminal stereotype as a new cultural norm. The consequences extend beyond the screen, shaping societal attitudes and reinforcing harmful stereotypes. This highlights the influential role of media representation in shaping perceptions and societal dynamics. It underscores the responsibility of cinema in not only reflecting a diverse and civilized society but also in avoiding the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes that can negatively impact real-world interactions.

### **Chapter Three : Black Americans Representation in Hollywood Cinema between past and present**

#### **Introduction**

African American actors and actresses have made significant progress in Hollywood, but it is unclear if their current representation reflects reality or is just an image that Hollywood wants us to believe. Historically, Hollywood has a poor record on racial equality. It committed shameful acts against African Americans, denying them roles on screen and instead using "blackface" to portray them. African American characters were depicted as inferior to white characters. Today, however, some of the biggest, most famous leading roles and acclaimed films feature African American actors. So, has Hollywood truly moved past racial discrimination, or is the current representation merely an illusion? The progress is real but doubts linger about how much more needs to change regarding racial equality in Hollywood.

In this chapter we will go through some movies from different eras and analyse their content with what we see relevant to our theme, and while we are at it we will analyse several scenes that would make the vision clear so we could determine whether there is a real change in representing African Americans in the American movies or is it the same state only with big fancy front of equality

## **The movies:**

### **3.1. The Help 2011**

The film is a 2011 drama about the talented white writer Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan. Skeeter aims to author a book depicting the experiences of African American maids from their perspective. This leads her to look deeper into their world, uncovering the horrors they endured while working for white families. Throughout the movie, the black maids share their personal stories with Skeeter involving slavery, humiliation, dehumanization, motherhood and more, on the condition that Skeeter keeps their identities concealed to protect their jobs and lives. The movie summarizes pre-civil rights African American life, directed by Tate Taylor and adapted from Kathryn Stockett's novel of the same name. (Stockett)



Figure 1:the Help Official Poster.

Source : (Amazon.com)

The poster portrays an unequal representation of the four main characters. The two Black women dressed as maids are standing next to the chairs where the two white women sit, illustrating the differing social statuses. Their postures also convey contrasting attitudes - the maids stand upright, whispering to each other, while the white women exhibit arrogance and superiority in the way they lounge in their seats. One appears nonchalant, almost haughty, while the other has a hint of discomfort or uncertainty. Their seated positions signify their higher rank compared to the maids. The bold yellow background directs focus to the simple purple lettering of the film's title. Overall, the composition of the poster highlights the racial and social hierarchy through the positioning and demeanor of the characters.



Scene n° 1 : showing the African American as a mammy to the white children.

Figure 2: The Maid Aibileen Clarck And The Baby Mae Mobley.

Source : (Y'allbehave.com)



Figure 3: The maid Constantine and Miss Skeeter, another spiritual mother.

Source : (Wordpress)

This scene, African-American maid Aibileen Clark is in the house where she works, wearing her uniform sitting with little Mae Mobley using phrases very kind and supportive like "You is kind, you is smart, you is important" to show love and appreciation to the girl, and the girl is all happy and laughing, light background music lightness and gentleness create a motherly atmosphere around the characters. Then almost immediately they started showing how the girl's biological mother didn't care about her at all. This scene repeats throughout the movie, not just with this maid, but with many others, to continue the old picture of how black women take good care of white children.



Figure 4: The maid Minny Jackson using Mrs Hilly's own bathroom.

Source : ([www.classhook.com](http://www.classhook.com)).

This is the most racist scene in the Help Movie. The scene takes place at Mrs. Hilly's house; what appears to be a party for women, at the table, when Mrs. Hilly begins to discuss her new idea of giving separate restrooms to the "colored people" where they worked, where she said, "Everybody knows they carry different diseases than us." while the maid minny stayed there to witness this horrible racist dialogue. The scene then shifts to Mr. Hilly's private room, on a rainy night, the maid Minny wants to use the bathroom and since her "private" bathroom is outside, she wants to use Mr. Hilly's bathroom. But Mrs. Hilly's refusal left her with no other choice. She take advantage without Mrs. Hill's knowledge, when she discovered that, she immediately fired her and not only that, she also spread rumors that Minny was a thief so no house would hire her as a maid. In this scene, there is a clear sense of the malicious superiority of Mrs. Hilly, who treats the black maids as if their feelings don't matter and as if they are an abomination to nature and should be treated as such.



Scene n° 3: the missing ring scene, stereotyping African American as thieves and criminals

Figure 5: the arrest of the maid Yule Mae for stealing Hilly's ring.

Source : (movie-pic)

The scene takes place at Mrs. Hilly's house, where the maid Yule finds a ring under the couch that clearly belongs to Mrs. Hilly and she hides it instead of returning it to her. At the beginning of the movie, the maid asked Mrs. Hilly and her husband to borrow some money to send her children to college. MR William leaves the room and Mrs. Hilly said she did not have the money, and as a maid she has to work hard to get it, so when the maid took the ring, it created a stereotypical image that black maids were untrustworthy and would most likely steal you if you are not careful enough. Later, the maid was arrested for theft. The scene promote the idea that black people lack good manners and are willing to commit crimes whenever necessary, which leads them being dehumanized and therefore considered a danger to stability and security of the peaceful white race.

### **3.2. The Hate U Give 2018: Stereotyping African Americans As Criminals And Violent People.**



Based on the 2017 novel of the same name, Angie Thomas decided to turn the story of Oscar Grant into a novel,(a young black man, was shot by BART police,Fruitvale Station), the film follows a 16-year-old Starr, an African-American teenager who leads a double life, much like her own, where she lives in "the hood" with her family. The second is a well-behaved student at a fancy school among rich white kids. Starr seems lost between two worlds, trying to fit into both and not lose either. It wasn't until she saw her childhood friend, Khalil, shot and killed by a police officer in the iconic scene of a white cop stopping a black driver for purely racist reasons. After the traumatic event, Starr's two worlds collapse, leaving her with no choice but to fight for one of them. At first, she seems morally grey but eventually finds the courage to seek justice for her friend's death. (Thomas)

The film is about the “Black Lives Matter” movement, told by someone who can stand from the perspective of both sides.



Figure 6: the Hate H Give official poster

Source : (m.imdb.com)

The poster shows two sides of the main character Starr, one side is a hooded black girl in a baggy hoodie and the other side is an obedient student in a school uniform. The two sides represent two completely opposite worlds that Starr is trying to integrate into, but she feels lost in both. The slit in the middle of the image summarizes the entire plot of the film, it shows the moral crisis that Starr is going through, whether to protect her people and demand justice for her friend or to stay silent and don't provoke that creepy white horror that could cost her her life if she speaks up.



Scene n°1: Khalil's death scene

Fig 7: Shoot First, Ask Questions Later.

Source : ([www.sojourners.net](http://www.sojourners.net))

Set at night, the main character Starr is being driven home by her childhood friend Khalil after a party that ended in a gunshot, which in itself is a stereotype that the party is only for black children. In this scene, Khalil did nothing wrong but was still arrested simply because he seemed "suspicious," which is a non-racist way of saying he seemed dark and violent. Khalil was arrested by a white police officer who shot him - twice - when he thought he was showing a gun

that was actually a hairbrush. The police officer who shot Khalil appeared horrified after discovering that it was just a hairbrush and not a gun. Later, at the police station, Starr is asked questions about Khalil to justify his murder. This scene stereotypes black men as rebels and violent people, as if owning a gun and endangering the lives of others is normal for them. The shot is a combination of medium shots and high shots to show off Starr and Khalil's body language as well as show their weakness and vulnerability to the audience in order to gain their sympathy. The scene took place at night, so of course the light is low but bright enough to show the characters' expressions of anger, frustration, fear, and pain, helping the audience connect emotionally with the characters.



Scene n° 2: Starr threatens Hailey with the “weapon”

Figure 8: Starr and Haily’s fight.

Source ([www.classhook.com](http://www.classhook.com))

“It is impossible to be unarmed when my Blackness is the weapon you fear.”DR. Shamell Bell.

The scene takes place at Starr's school, which is mainly for rich white kids, where Starr argues with Haily, defending her murdered friend. Haily's thoughts in this scene reflect what all white people are thinking when she says that the hairbrush in Khalil's hand could be used as a weapon, but in the hands of a white child, it just a hairbrush.

Scene n° 3: the white boyfriend who “doesn’t see colour”



Figure 9: Chris the white savior  
(IMDB)

Chris is Starr's boyfriend, who shows support and appreciation for Starr throughout the film, Chris represents the white savior trope. The character who's never racist, always helping and kind is the way to attract the white audience and gives them a sense of relatability to the scene and it is usually used to increase the watches.

### 3.3. Fruitvale Station:

Based on a true story, the official poster depicts a desperate hopeless black young man. Who is trying to support his family after getting himself in troubles with drug dealers, but he decides to quit dealing with drugs and find a job, and start a new life.

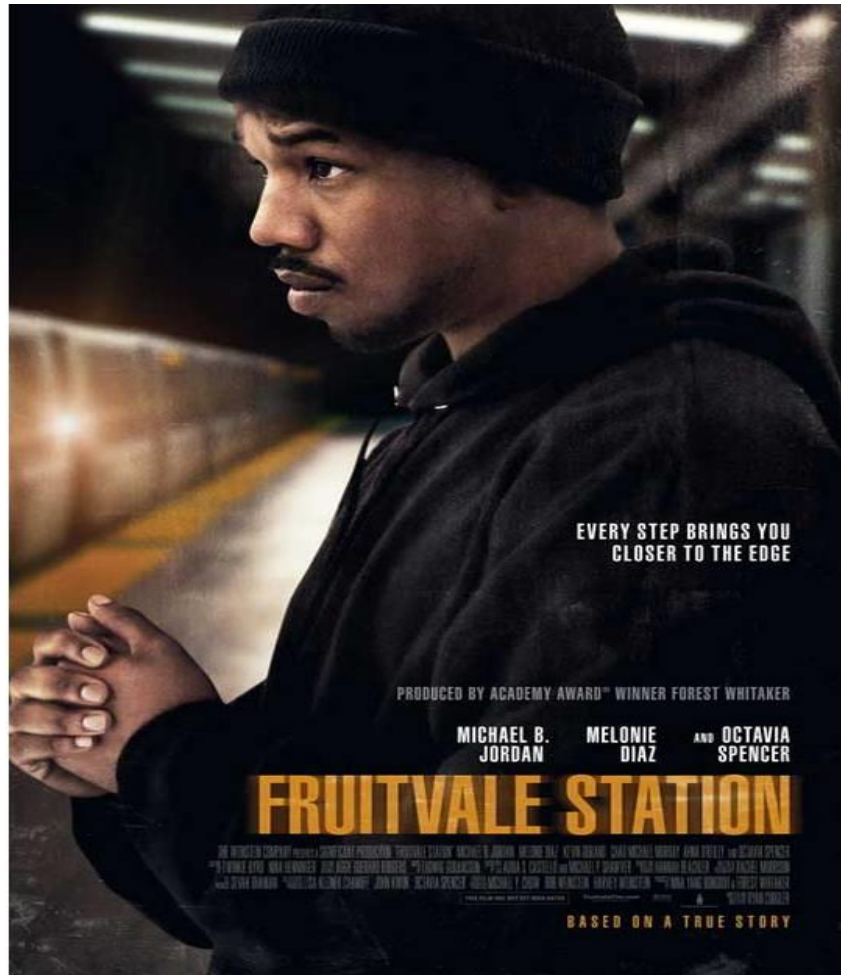


Figure 10: Fruitvale Station Official Poster

Source : (Wikipedia)

The film depicts the last day of the life of Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old from Hayward, California, before he was fatally shot by BART Police in the early morning hours of January 1, 2009. It begins with actual footage of Oscar and his friends being detained by BART Police at the Fruitvale station in Oakland on January 1, 2009, at 2:15 a.m., right before the shooting. Oscar tried not to start a fight with a guy he met before when he was in prison. But BART police respond to the scene, and Oscar is among the passengers who are detained. While being restrained by officers Caruso and Ingram, Oscar is shot in the back by Ingram. A stunned Caruso

demands to know what happened. Oscar is rushed to the hospital and dies just hours after undergoing emergency surgery.

The movie portrays the idea of African American Men as “Criminal and Dangerous” (Oliver), and demonstrates ways in which black males are limited from reaching their full potential due to preconceived ideologies of what a black man should be, institutional racism, and state-sanctioned violence.

### 3.4.The Birth of a Nation 1915.

The poster shows a member of the Ku Klux Klan in a heroic pose reflecting courage, strength, and victory. The KKK member is holding a torch commonly used to burn black people and frighten them on the battlefield. Masks are also the official uniform of KKK members. It allows the member's identity to be hidden and opponents to be afraid.

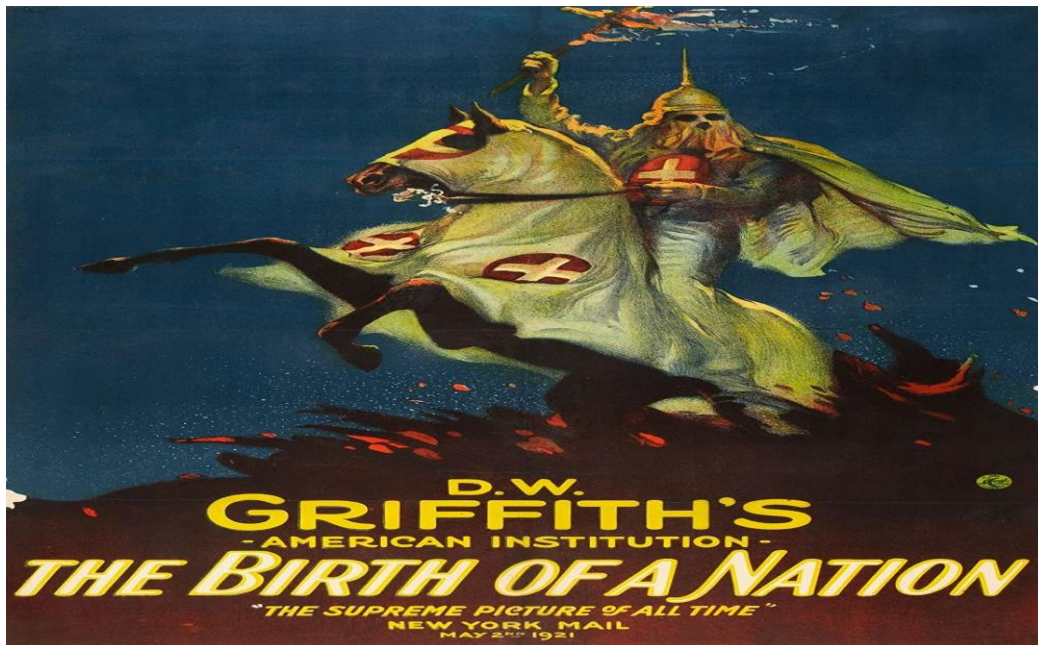


Figure 11: The Birth of a Nation's poster

Source : (album-online.com)

The film is about drama and war (silent film) that tells the story of two families, the Stonemans and the Cameroonians, whose friendship is affected by the civil war and turns from good friends to enemies. The film depicts the Ku Klux Klan as heroes who saved the South from savages, who were clearly black, but were actually white people in blackface, inflicting incredible damage on black people. The film is considered the most racist film ever made, as its horrific depiction of African Americans helped create stereotypical images that are carried over into America to this very day.



Scene n°1: the black buck chasing the innocent white lady

Figure 12: the black buck

Source : (jumpcut.org)

The scene took place in the forest, the white girl was waiting for the white man, suddenly a black-faced man appeared from behind and stood next to her, the man's facial expression showed his intentions far from pure, this scene stereotyped black people as also desiring to sexually assault innocent white women and they were called black bucks. The scene ends with the white

woman jumping off the hill to escape the savage black man and the KKK members hunting him down to kill him without trial, which also helps normalize the execution of black people, arguing that black people did not deserve a fair trial.



Scene n°2: house of representative controlled by the black people.

Figure 13: black people in Master's Hall

Source : (blogspot.com)

The scene took place in the Hall's room, where for the first time 101 black people gathered with 23 white people, the scene showed that black people were uncivilized and immature, showing childish and barbaric behavior, the place was a mess, black people at the Hall's first floor while noble white people are on the top floor looking down at them with disgust in their faces because of the actions of the black people between taking their shoes off, drinking alcohol in the middle of the hall, not sitting in their places and laughing and making a mess that even their leaders couldn't control. This scene presents black people as savages who do not deserve



equality or leadership positions and will always be ruled by civilized white nobles or chaos will result.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis of the four movies and their portrayal of black Americans, it is evident that there has been a discernible shift in representation over time, albeit with lingering challenges. In films released before 1999, black characters were predominantly relegated to subservient roles such as slaves, maids, and criminals, reinforcing demeaning stereotypes and perpetuating racial inequality. Despite the overt racism in these films, they remain iconic in American cinema history. Moving into the post-2000 era, while the portrayal of black Americans continues to face issues, there are noticeable improvements. There is a reduction in overtly derogatory depictions, and black actors are increasingly cast in diverse and significant roles such as police officers, teachers, and professionals. This shift suggests a gradual but incomplete evolution towards more positive and multifaceted representations of African Americans in mainstream cinema.

However, challenges persist, as some films purportedly addressing racism and promoting equality still fall short in fully challenging and dismantling harmful stereotypes. The analysis underscores the complex landscape of representation in cinema, where progress is evident yet uneven, requiring ongoing vigilance and critique to achieve more authentic and empowering portrayals of black Americans in media.

### **Conclusion of The Survey**

American cinema has a huge impact on American streets, even around the world. The images presented in American cinema shape the thinking and outlook of Americans, and determine the way of behaving and dealing with different matters in life. Good representation means social acceptance while poor representation will lead to social rejection, as has been the case for African Americans throughout decades.

American cinema has historically depicted African Americans as Toms, Mammies, slaves, bucks, and other racial stereotypes that have led to the dehumanization and portrayal of African Americans as dangerous or too naive to be treated. Therefore, the only expected way to deal with an African American was to avoid him and fear him or to mock him for personal amusement.

American cinema claims to support and protect human rights and criminalize racism and discrimination, but there is still clear racial, religious, and cultural discrimination in almost every Hollywood movie and this discrimination included African American actors, actresses, producers ....etc.

The Civil War may have ended slavery and brought freedom to black people, but it did not give them immunity from discrimination and racism, and Hollywood certainly didn't help make things better for the African Americans even after years of fighting it both on and off the screen. Finally, this study's results headed to a more civilised world that people one day don't care about the person's cultural and racial background and consider art as a noble message that can only be delivered by people of great talent and great presence on the screen regardless on skin colour. As we notice a great African Americans shine in Hollywood sky and earn their places on the big screen by doing what they meant to be doing and serve a beautiful case which is serving art.

Work cited :

<<https://m.imdb.com>>.

<<http://www.classhook.com>>.

2020.

[album-online.com](http://album-online.com).

Amazon.com. <<http://www.Amazon.com>>.

[blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com). 2015.

[blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com). 2015.

Bordow, Scott. «Black Representation in film, TV still needed behind the scene/ Arizona State University.» 2022.

Burns, Janet. «Black Women Are Besieged On Social Media,And White Apathy Da,ns Us All.» 27 December 2017.

Clark, Alexis. 13 february 2019. <[www.history.com/news/blackface-history-racism-origins](http://www.history.com/news/blackface-history-racism-origins)>.

CNN. [This is Why Blackface is Offensive/Kaur Harmeet U.S.A.](https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/13/entertainment/blackface-offensive/index.html)

Cole, Teju. [The White Savior Industrial Complex](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/mar/21/white-savior-industrial-complex). 21 03 2012.

Garbner, George. «Journal of Communication.» (s.d.): 173-99.

Jackson, Ashawnta. [How Film Ads Were Part of the Fight Against Segregation](https://www.jstor.org/stable/48788888). JSTOR Daily ( Academic Library ), 18 February 2022.

[jumpcut.org](http://jumpcut.org).

Lindner, Jannik. «Black Representation In Film Statistics.» 2024.

movie-pic. [Yule Mae being arrested](https://thehelpmovie.fandom.com/wiki/Yule_Mae_being_arrested). <[https://the help movie.fandom.com](https://thehelpmovie.fandom.com)>.

Ms.magazine. «The Era is Essensial to Democracy, Banned : Gender, Race and Sexuality Studeis.» [Ms.magazine](https://www.msmagazine.com/story/2023/06/16/2023-06-16) (06/16/2023).

Oliver, Mery Beth. [Journal of African American Studies](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2363888) (2003): 3-18.

Rochester, N.Y. «The North Star.» [library of Congress, Washington, DC](https://www.loc.gov/rr/rds/na/nst.html) (1847-1851).

Spingran, Adena. «Uncle Tom From Martyr to Traitor.» Spingarn, Adena. Uncle Tom From Martyr to Traitor. 2018.

Stockett, Kathryn. «The Help.» Novel by Kathryn Stockett. Penguin Books, 10 february 2009.

Stowe, Hareet Beecher. «Uncle Tom's Cabinet.» 1852.

Thomas, Angie. «The Hate U Give.» February 28,2017. 444.

Wikipedia. Fruitvale Station. 2013.

Wordpress. A Critical Review of the Novel the Help.

www.classhook.com. Bathroom Segregation.

Y'allbehave.com. adventure of an austin supernanny. <<http://www.yallbehave.com>>.

